

CLANDESTINE DRUG LAB OPERATIONS

During routine emergency responses to fires or other emergencies it is possible that responders will discover the presence of a clandestine drug laboratory. Clandestine drug laboratories by their nature are disguised and are often encountered accidentally in a great variety of situations, including warehouses, store fronts, apartment buildings, single family dwellings, rural outbuildings and even truck trailer accidents. It should be generally understood that response to a clandestine drug laboratory is a hazardous materials incident. These types of incidents may expose you to toxic, flammable, explosive, and corrosive atmospheres. Without proper training, your health and safety are at risk.

Proper personal protective equipment at a clandestine drug lab incident is absolutely critical for avoiding exposure. Structural fire fighting or EMS gear offers little, if any, protection in such situations. In order to be able to recognize when you are inadequately protected, you must be aware of the limitations of your clothing and SCBA. You must understand that clothing which is adequate in one situation may be inadequate or even dangerous in another. No one protective clothing system will protect you from all situations.

In any emergency situation involving clandestine drug labs there is a risk of exposure to toxins; those materials that are capable of causing injury or death when absorbed. Through an understanding of the types of toxins, their effects, the various routes of entry, and specific biological hazards, emergency response agencies can take more appropriate actions to ensure their own health and safety during clandestine drug laboratory operations. In addition, it should be noted that effective clandestine drug lab incident response requires a well-functioning Incident Management System (IMS). Operating without an IMS or without a complete understanding of how an IMS works is inefficient and dangerous to all agencies involved. Listed in the guidelines are the current OSHA and NFPA laws and standards that apply to emergency response agencies who respond to hazardous materials incidents. Below is a discussion of the application of those hazardous materials competencies to the special hazardous materials response challenges posed by clandestine drug lab operations.

Learning Objectives

The following learning objectives *should be the minimum in any Clan Lab Course*. Upon completion of the course, participants will be able to:

- Discuss terminology associated with drug labs (glossary).
- Discuss history of clan labs.
- Demonstrate, through chemical reaction and/or video format, the possible catastrophic results of chemical interactions and reactions.
- Be familiar with the hazards associated with drug lab operations.
- Be familiar with some chemicals found at a drug lab operation.
- Explain the need for a personal protective equipment program for fire, police, and EMS personnel.
- Explain the routes of exposure and toxicological effects of short term exposures (acute) to these precursor chemicals and the possible long term (chronic) effects of clan lab chemicals on the human body.
- Discuss the federal laws and national standards associated with the use of PPE and chemical response programs.
- List common locations of clan lab operations.
- Explain the needs for well-established standard operating procedures within the fire department and between other agencies.
- Describe, through generic standard operating procedures, the operational goals and objectives for each of the following organizations:
 - Fire Department (First Responder)
 - Fire Department HMRT (Hazardous Materials Response Team)
 - Local Police
 - EMS

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| RESPONSE Training Issues | Awareness | Operations | Technician | Incident Commander | HM Branch Officer | HM Safety Officer | OSHA: Specialist NFPA: Spec Emp / A & Tech Specialties | OSHA: Spec Emp NFPA: Spec Emp B,C | EMS Level 1 | EMS Level 2 | Hospital Personnel | Special Topics | Related Standards |
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Clandestine Drug Lab Operations

- Speak to the issue of responsibility for clean-up and termination of a clan lab incident.
- Explain the importance of scene management at a clan lab incident.
- List the common components of an Incident Management System.
- Overview decontamination procedures.
- Overview termination procedures.
- Explain why post-incident analysis and evaluation are necessary elements of scene management.

Competencies

The student will be able to:

- Name at least three general hazards associated with drug lab operations.
- Select from a list of chemicals those most commonly found in drug lab operations.
- Name two catastrophic results of chemical interactions at drug lab operations.
- Describe his/her standard operating procedures for dealing with drug lab operations and name the contact personnel from at least one law enforcement agency that they would most likely deal with.
- Describe at least two key elements of a PPE program.
- Explain the biological side effects of exposures to precursor chemicals used in illicit drug labs and express the possible acute and chronic effects of exposures to these chemical environments.
- Generally describe the overall operational goal and objectives of the following organizations:
 - Fire Department (First Responder)
 - Fire Department HMRT Units
 - Local Police Department
 - EMS
- Describe the need for establishing clean-up and termination responsibilities.

STIMULANTS

Stimulants are compounds which affect the central nervous system by accelerating its activities. Stimulants are either natural or synthetic. An example of a synthetic would be methamphetamine and a natural stimulant example would be adrenaline.

A. Natural

The first natural stimulant discovered was epinephrine (adrenaline), a substance found in adrenal glands of animals. Its effects were first discovered in 1899.

B. Synthetic

In 1919, a Japanese chemist developed the first synthetic stimulant, methamphetamine. In 1927, a substance called 1-phenyl 2-aminopropane and its action were first described leading to the further research and development of benzedrine and dexedrine (common drugs used during the late sixties and early seventies for weight control).

CLANDESTINE DRUG LABS

The following general information is based on Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Special Agent Patrick Gregory's testimony before the California Select Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse on November 15, 1985.

On a national average, one of five (or twenty percent) of all clandestine laboratories result in, and/or are discovered through, fires and/or explosives. During 70 clandestine laboratory investigations, ten percent involved agents being confronted by suspects who had fully automatic and silenced weapons and some form of booby traps or explosive devices. In thirty percent of the cases, defendants were using electronic counter-measures, ranging from scanners to sophisticated video monitors to sound sensing devices.

During the course of these investigations, thirteen firefighters and four police officers required medical treatment as a result of exposure to hazardous chemicals and chemical wastes. Minor injuries resulted from exposure to hazardous chemicals and chemical wastes. Because of exposure to caustic, corrosive, carcinogenic, irritating, explosive, and flammable substances encountered at lab sites, every agent has suffered minor injuries including burns, rashes, headaches, light headedness, and nausea.

The first lab seized in California was in 1963 (amphetamine) in Santa Cruz.

1984 - 93 labs seized in California

1985 - 215 labs seized in California

1986 - 325 labs seized in California

Of the 325 labs seized in California, 293 were Methamphetamine. Of those 293 labs, 82.5% were using Ephedrine as the primary chemical.

1986 - 509 labs seized nationwide

1987 - 489 labs seized in California

1987 - 682 labs seized in the United States

1988 - Approximately 1,200 laboratories were seized by law enforcement agencies, federal, state, and local police nationwide.

Clandestine Drug Laboratories remain the principle source for methamphetamine. States where most clandestine laboratories appear to be operating are:

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| • Southern and Northern California | • Florida |
| • Eastern Texas | • Pennsylvania |
| • Oregon and Washington | • New Jersey |
| • New Mexico | |

TYPES OF LABS AND HAZARDS

A. Extraction Labs

This is where raw plant material is changed into a finished drug by the use of chemical solvents and/or acids. The chemical structure of the drug is not altered. Some examples of this are marijuana to hashish, opium to morphine.

Also under this title are indoor or underground confined space marijuana grow farms. Marijuana grow farms have a high rate of booby trap. They grow marijuana in confined space grows so that they can reduce the oxygen levels in the grow area, making the plant produce more sap, which means more tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). This is accomplished by flooding the confined area with either carbon dioxide or propane. Both gases will displace the available oxygen, and, in the case of propane, produce a possible flammable and explosive atmosphere. Without instrumentation, the firefighter has no way of evaluating the hazard, which is O₂ deficient and possibly flammable. If faced with a rescue, these confined spaces should be approached according to OSHA's proposed Confined Space Protocol 29 CFR 1910.146.

B. Conversion Labs

Currently thought to be the most prevalent. In these labs, a raw or unfinished drug product is changed into a finished or refined drug. Here the chemical structure is changed. Examples of this are cocaine base to cocaine hydrochloride (the white powder sold on the streets as cocaine), and cocaine hydrochloride to cocaine sulfate (aka crack or rock cocaine). Numerous flammable liquids, corrosives, acids, and bases, as well as oxidizing agents, are found at these sites.

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